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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006521

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV JO

SUBJECT: GOJ DISSOLVES SOCIETY FOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS

REF: A. AMMAN 006154

1B. AMMAN 5838

1C. AMMAN 5576

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM. REASONS 1.5 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On October 29, the Ministry of Interior officially dissolved the Jordanian Society for Citizens' Rights (JSCR). Despite previous media attention to the plight of the JSCR, coverage of the dissolution has been scant, coming as it did the day after the murder of Larry Foley. MFA officials attempted to assure PolOffs that the move was not politically motivated and pledged to follow up. END SUMMARY

JSCR DISSOLVED

12. (C) On October 31, PolOff and visiting NEA/ARN officer Susan Ziadeh met with JSCR President Fawzi Samhoury. Samhoury said that on October 29 the Governor of Amman, Abdel Karim Malahme, called Samhoury into his office to present him with a letter signed by the Minister of Interior, Qaftam Majali. The short missive (a copy of which Samhoury provided us) said the JSCR was officially dissolved pursuant to Article 16 of the Societies and Charitable Organizations Law of 1966. The letter contained no additional information regarding the closure.

3 (C) Samhoury said that on October 18, the JSCR had voted, by a large majority, to submit the financial records requested by the GOJ in previous correspondence (reftels). The records were sent to the Ministry of Interior on October 22. Since that time, the GOJ has not commented on the submission of the documents, and it was not clear to Samhoury whether the GOJ reviewed the documents before the decision to dissolve the JSCR was made.

14. (C) Note: according to Samhoury, Dr. Khalid Tahaine, the MFA's action officer on human rights, called him on October 18 to say that the GOJ was upset over reports issued by the JSCR relating to Palestinian-Jordanians losing their passports through implementation of 1988 disengagement laws (reftels). End note.

5 (C) Samhoury was despondent over the future of the JSCR. He said that he was reviewing the possibility of legal action. He said he is also in contact with outspoken former MP Toujan Faisal, and planned to talk to the international media. Note: local press coverage of the JSCR's demise has been scant, despite regular coverage prior to the GOJ action of October 29.

MFA: WE'RE LOOKING INTO IT

16. (C) On November 4, A/PolCouns and Poloff met with MFA Legal Adviser Samer Naber and MFA Human Rights Officer Tahaine to obtain the GOJ's side of the story. Both confirmed that the action to close down the JSCR was based on legal infractions, not politics. "There is a legal basis for the action, and there were internal disputes within the JSCR that led to the closure," Tahaine stated repeatedly. Naber noted that the MFA had requested from the Min Int an explanation of the case and any relevant supporting documents. He said the MFA would follow-up with the Min Int.

17. (C) Tahaine however, strongly implied that political considerations were a factor, stating that "all of these (human rights) organizations have affiliations with groups outside Jordan, and this is what we mean when we are talking about 'Jordan first'." At that point, Naber jumped in, reiterated that the MFA had no official explanation of the case and was waiting to hear from the Min Int, and that "Jordan first" has nothing to do with the JSCR. As the meeting concluded, PolOffs noted that the closing of an independent human rights organization had the potential to damage Jordan's reputation. Naber acknowledged this reality and promised again to follow-up with the Min Int.

COMMENT

18. (C) The GOJ's dissolution of the JSCR is an unwelcome and untimely development. Samhoury has a consistent and reliable human rights contact for several years. At first glance, there is reason to believe the GOJ's legal action is merely a pretext to close the JSCR. That said, the GOJ action may well rest on defensible legal ground, and Samhoury's options for legal redress have not been exhausted. We have cautioned the GOJ, on several occasions and at levels up to the PM, that the closing of the JSCR would be scrutinized by the international media and human rights activists. We will continue to track this closely.

GNEHM